A National Plan for Managing White-nose Syndrome in Bats

White-nose syndrome in bats

White-nose syndrome is a disease affecting hibernating bats. Named for the white fungus that appears on the muzzle and other body parts of hibernating bats, WNS is associated with extensive mortality of bats in eastern North America. Bats with WNS exhibit uncharacteristic behavior during cold winter months, including flying outside in the day and clustering near the entrance of hibernacula.

More than half of the 45 bat species living in the United States rely on hibernation for winter survival. Four endangered species and subspecies of hibernating bats in the United States are already affected by or are at risk from WNS.

Spread of WNS

The primary method of transfer of the fungus that causes WNS, *Geomyces destructans,* is thought to be through bat-to-bat contact, but biologists believe it can also be transferred inadvertently by humans.

First documented in New York in January 2007, WNS has killed more than 5.5 million bats in the Northeast and has spread quickly across the eastern United States and Canada. The fungus has been identified as far west as Oklahoma and is expected to continue spreading.

### Working together to manage WNS: a national plan

As WNS spreads, the challenges facing wildlife managers in understanding threats to bat populations and managing WNS continue to increase. Collaboration among state, federal and tribal wildlife management agencies and NGOs is essential to the survival of bat species across North America.

Bats affected with white-nose syndrome

Nancy Heaslip/NYDEC

The national plan provides a framework for coordinating and managing the national investigation and response to WNS. The plan outlines the actions necessary for state, federal and tribal coordination, and provides an overall strategy for investigating the cause of WNS and finding a way to manage it.

The plan also identifies roles of federal, state and tribal agencies and non-government organizations in addressing WNS nationally.

Map by: Cal Butchkoski, PA Game Commission
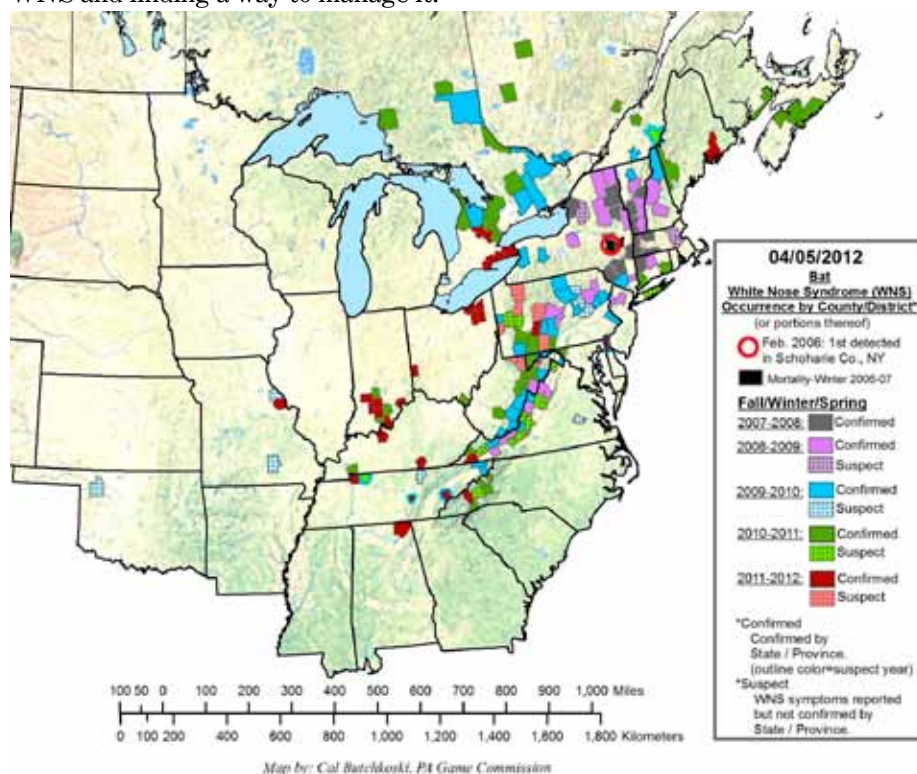
The plan identifies seven key elements for the national response, and outlines the goals and activities of the working groups that will address them:

- Communications and Outreach
- Data and Technical Information Management
- Diagnostics
- Disease Management
- Etiology and Epidemiological Research
- Disease Surveillance
- Conservation and Recovery

A subsequent adaptive implementation plan will contain details on the actions that are to be carried out, the entities responsible for implementation of each action, and the estimated costs associated.

Status of the National Plan

The National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies, and Tribes in Managing White-nose Syndrome in Bats was finalized in May 2011. The FWS reeceived more than 17,000 public comments on the draft national plan during a 60 day review and public comment period in winter 2010.

The plan was developed through a collaborative state, federal and tribal effort, including agency representatives from:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
  - Forest Service
- U.S. Department of Defense
  - Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of the Interior
  - Bureau of Land Management
  - Fish and Wildlife Service
  - Geological Survey
  - National Park Service
- States
  - Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
  - Missouri Department of Conservation
  - New York Department of Environmental Conservation
  - Pennsylvania Game Commission
  - Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
  - Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Tribes
  - St Regis Mohawk Tribe, Environment Division

How can I find out more about the national plan?
To find out more about the WNS National Plan, please contact:

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Or visit the WNS website: http://www. WhiteNoseSyndrome.org

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